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Celebrating Revolutions: Notes on Queer of Colour Critique and Queerness in India

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On 5 August 2019, the Hindu-nationalist government headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) revoked article 370 of the Indian constitution that secured a special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir in the Union of India.[1] The accession of Muslim-majority Kashmir to India, partially achieved since the Indian independence of 1947, became complete as the presidential order terminating the privileged status of Kashmir received quasi-total support across all political parties and public in India. The colonial aggrandisement of the territory of Kashmir and its peoples, through an indefinite curfew and lockdown of media and internet in the region emblematised the integration of Kashmir to India, becoming fertile ground for euphoric celebrations of India's military prowess, political clout and, more significantly, political uniformity of all its states. In addition to the nation-wide celebrations of Indian unity and proposals for large-scale economic investment projects in the region, calls for marrying Kashmiri women multiplied in a protracted period of time.[2] In this exultant moment of national pride, certain queer Hindu-fundamentalist organisations and activists either remained silent on the condemnation of hyper Hindu-nationalism or actively endorsed the colonial occupation of Kashmir. The queer Hindu alliance group on social media, for instance, welcomed the decision for a unified country and its members celebrated variously the inclusion of Kashmiri queers in India suggesting that due to special provisions in the state the queer community could not partake of the freedom of other queer citizens in India. Such

claims, without doubt, are specious. Revelatory of the routine disregard for the colonisation of Kashmir and its peoples, they signal the Hindutva brand of queer India that establishes Muslim communities as outsiders to the nation in need of an emancipatory Hindu queerness.[3]

The present essay, part of a larger project under the aegis of the Decolonizing Sexualities Network (DSN, www.decolonizingsexualities.org) is a *chantier* developing albeit occasionally contradictory frames of sexualities, non-normative and/or queer sexualities, and their enmeshment in debates on various trans/national formations of domination, oppression and resistance. Focusing on one specific geopolitical entity, it seeks to analyse the faultlines,[4] the fissures of queer mobilisation and activism in postcolonial India with an explicit referencing of the queer of colour critique. Taking as point of departure the celebratory moment of queerness in contemporary India, signalled by the termination of the colonial-era law criminalising homosexuality, I attempt to extend the discussion to horizons that incorporate transnational exchange. In other words, in what follows, a sustained emphasis on queer of colour critique brings into focus the transnational exchange that *may* inform queer mobilisation in India. Without a doubt, the interaction between these two cultures of analysis is not novel, even though their overt intersections remain largely absent in academic scholarship. Of course, this frame of queer of colour critique is informed by my positionality as a diasporic queer of colour subject residing in the global north. Such frames do not preclude or disqualify a) the robustness and achievement of queer struggles in India; suffice to highlight that the queer movement in India, like movements globally, is not a singular monolith and is not confined to the country given that the mobilisation benefits from diasporic input inevitably. This essay therefore does not offer a critique of the movement *per se*. And, b) this frame speaks to the multiple ways in which queerness belongs to India and South Asia. In this paper, therefore, I reflect upon the significance of queer of colour critique and what it offers to a reading of queer activism in India. Even though it might figure as a strange combination, it is not a new approach since the criss-crossing lines have been explored earlier without rendering the interconnection explicit.[5]

Charting queer of colour critique

Intersection of queer and globalisation studies offers a prime example of queer counter-vigilance. The co-optation of the queer subject in the global consumer industry (Pink Dollar, Pink Pound and Pink Capital) animates the trenchant critiques against the absence of class analysis in queer studies. Queer theorists uncover the implication of heteropatriarchal regimes in the sustenance of transnational flows of goods that affect queer consumers as well. Initial accounts of queerness of colour reflected upon how home and the US nation often worked to exclude racialised and diasporic subjects from queerness and political economy whereby a collusion between national, economic and political traditions is enacted upon gendered and sexual minority subjects (Reddy, 1997, 356). Emblematic of the thrust of postcolonial, feminist, Marxist and queer crossings in contemporary critical theory, therefore, queer of colour and queer diasporic critique proliferate instances of multi-focal assessment of sexual, gender, racial and trans/national discourses.

Foregrounding the critical engagement with race, migration and political and economic sexualities, queer of colour critique as a field of inquiry emanates within the United States academy. It strives to suture analyses of sexuality and gender, the two oft-discussed analytics in queer theory, to appraisals of race and the politics of class, whereby racialised and sexual sites are, in the words of Roderick Ferguson, "multiply determined, regulated, and excluded by differences of race, class, sexuality, and gender" (2013, 1). Constructing the queer of colour analysis in order to recognise and interrogate the "unimagined alliances" of ostensibly disparate cultural formations such as Marxism and liberal ideology as they converge in the maintenance of heteronorms (2013, 3), Ferguson continues,

> the formation was an address to Marxism, ethnic studies, queer studies, postcolonial and feminist studies. Queer of color critique also provided a method for analyzing cultural formations as registries of the intersections of race, political economy, gender, and sexuality. In this way, queer of color critique attempted to wrest cultural and aesthetic formations away from interpretations that neglected to situate those formations within analyses of racial capitalism and the racial state. (2018)

As Elena Keisling suggests, queer of colour critique enabled to bridge "the deep rift between blackness and queerness" as two separate political categories (2017). In other words, queer of colour critique provides tools to critically factor in sociocultural processes such as race, sexuality, capitalism and class *inter alia* in analyses of queerness. Making these discussions an integral part of queer studies is one of the key tenets of the queer of colour project, which brings together, in a double bind, nuanced analyses of queerness and racial capitalism or the political economy of race.[6] One caveat however is necessary: queer of colour critique is not a critique of queer studies *per se*. It addresses the marked absence of specific social categories and in this regard constitutes a critical engagement in queer studies instead. In this regard, it extends the scope of queer theory. In his work on queer of colour critique, Ferguson, who coined the term, makes this implication apparent. He contends that,

> As an effort designed to address connections between race, sexuality, and political economy, queer of color critique had to begin by confronting a founding limitation of queer studies, a limitation that obscured the very connections that queer of color critique was interested in exposing. That limitation had to do with an initial ambivalence within queer studies about the connections that sexuality has to other modes of difference. (2018)

In other words, queer of colour critique operates by bringing into focus the connections of sexuality to other modes of difference, or other factors/elements of difference. This is the most important aspect of queer of colour critique, i.e., not solely a variable relation but *any* intersectional relation that sexuality might have with other elements of difference. Akin to women of colour thinking, queer of colour theorisation eschews "the comparative analytic of minority nationalisms that, while themselves critical of the racial violence underpinning modern power, ultimately reproduced its comparative method" (Hong and Ferguson, 2011, 8). The growing body of critical literature on the queer of colour critique articulates the need to comprehend sexuality studies as part of global critical thinking.[7]

Exemplary of accounting for global geopolitical power imbalance, queer of colour reading resists the call to celebrating queerness uncritically. For instance, the

2008 decision to upturn the Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) policy in the US army, despite its signalling a victory for equality, remains a contentious site when read through the queer of colour frame. The impact of war and imperialism, relatively higher on people of colour communities, especially Black, Hispanic and immigrant populations, preoccupies queer of colour critique even though DADT constitutes an inclusive policy for lesbians and gays. Queer of colour critique reflects on the negative implications of enrolment in war for queer subjects and posits resistance to the colonial agenda of war as being of utmost importance. Certainly, given the skewed economic power relations between racial communities in the US, employment in war for communities of colour functions as an alternative to economic disenfranchisement. However, what queer of colour critique exposes instead is the nefarious connections between racialised impoverishment, DADT and how the upturning itself of the silence around sexuality in the army, participate in reigning in queerness in often unjust wars and imperial enterprises.

Queer of colour and postcolonial contexts

Although Ferguson's discussion focuses on the particularities of the US, queer of colour critiques prove apposite in other, larger postcolonial and racialised contexts as well. For instance, Adi Kuntsman and Esperanza Miyake's collection *Out of Place: Interrogating Silences in Queerness/Raciality* (2008) applies an earlier frame of queer of colour analysis to transnational practices, including variously distinct subjects such as bio-surveillance in the First World and the nationalist/class affiliations in the Third World. Other insightful studies examine the imbrication of racial dichotomy in the production of homosexuality in popular culture in the US, the implication of orientalist metaphors in sexual orientation, the cross-racial/cross-sexual alliance of queers and terror and, the "ascendancy of whiteness" in Western queer discourse (Sommerville 2000, 39-76; Ahmed, 2006, 112-20; Puar, 2007, 24-32). In challenging the operations of "ideologies of discreteness", to borrow from Ferguson, queer of colour analysis works to highlight compelling interconnections between capitalist structures, national boundaries, racialised hierarchies and heteronormative configurations (2013, 4).

In what follows I engage queer of colour critique in relation to queer activism in India. What I suggest, hopefully, is that queer mobilisation cannot be a single-issue

political imperative. It must take cognisance of the fissures, the faultlines, the immediacy of social fractures as queer of colour critique has made it possible to imagine. In the case of India, caste, class, gendered violence, religious affiliation, language, as in English language domination, and trans issues, which have a different trajectory than in the west, are all interconnected rubrics that queer activism routinely marginalises at its own peril. In express demands of solidarity around decriminalisation of same-sex sexual acts prior to September 2018, queer movements in India reified, perhaps paradoxically so, the specificities of multiple constituencies invested in embattling the colonial era law. In other words, the calls for unity brought to the fore the fissures along lines of cis/trans, caste, class, and religion *inter alia*. For instance, trans communities engaged in campaigns against the Rights of Transgender Bill 2014 and successive versions until it became an act titled, Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act in 2019, had dissimilar demands to field than, say, the gay communities. Additionally, queer and anti-caste activists, such as Akhil Kang, reflected upon the 'caste-class' networks of inequality that queer mobilisation upheld during the campaigns. Kang's contribution appeared the day following the verdict on decriminalisation and critiqued the entrenched caste inequalities in queer circuits in the country (2018).

Before proceeding with the discussion, two vital provisos on the use of terms are, in my view, imperative. First, "queer" as a concept and term has widely circulated due to the US predominance in the world and its cultural politics. The term, as well known, even in France, circulates in the context of global political-sexual economy. The term stands on its own despite the efforts at translating it to local communities. In India, the term has been variously deployed in addition to LGBT+.[8] Second, Roderick Ferguson, the author of the foundational text for queer of colour critique, in a later essay demonstrates the indebtedness of queer of colour critique to postcolonial studies, calling the latter "the unread genealogy of queer of color critique" (2015, 50). It is in this regard that I attempt to read postcolonial sites and queer of colour critique in parallel whilst I instructively allude to the failures of postcolonial cultures.

Colonial to postcolonial law

Firmly suturing the discussion to the promise of equality, justice and liberty for the citizens of independent India, I traverse back to the law against same-sex practices that regulated the lives of entire queer population in the country until 6 September 2018. This law is Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which came into existence in 1860 under the governorship of T.B. Macaulay. It clearly enacted the desire of the British Raj (the empire) to curb same-sex and non-procreative sexual activities in the colonies and similar laws were put into place in Sri Lanka, Singapore and other colonies. Reading the law even with insufficient care reveals the impulse to control and regiment the sexual acts of the subject of empire. Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code stipulates,

> Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine.
> Explanation: Penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary to the offence described in this section. (*Indian Penal Code* on IndianKanoon.org)

Rightly then, on 6 September 2018, the Supreme Court of India heard curative petitions against Section 377 and decriminalised homosexuality in the largest country of South Asia, striking down one of the last vestiges of colonial stronghold and Victorian morality in the region.[9] It was like the birth of independent India a similar historic moment. Appealing to the larger constitutional guarantees of privacy (covered by the notion of liberty), equality and justice, the queer community in India gained victory over an oppressive and dated law. One of the Supreme court judges participant in the verdict, Justice Indu Malhotra, directly alluded the promise of equality and justice in the constitution, declaring that "History owes an apology to this (LGBTQ) community and their families for the delay in providing redressal for the ignominy and ostracism that they have suffered through centuries". The sheer protracted scale of the movement which created a widespread consensus of celebration is surely noteworthy. The tireless community mobilisation that won this victory instantiates a break with the

logic of binaries of freedom/oppression as the queer subject became the free political subject.

Queer protests

Whilst collective mobilisation against an oppressive law remains crucial, it requires consensus on negotiating difference(s), often producing erasure of possible coalitional political action that queer of colour thinking addresses in relation to the connectedness of identity enunciations. I engage in a critique of positions of power, whether global or local, colonial or postcolonial, transnational or national. My attempt is to unbraid inequitable binary constructs and signal the complicity with the dominant in allegedly disempowered sites of identity. Working on the premise, informed by the ongoing critical debates in the field of queer of colour studies, that, marginalised identities can inevitably serve to garner support for hegemonic constructs even when they dispute the authority of master discourses in other sites, this essay therefore extends the analysis of operations of power in the domain queer mobilisation in India.

Queer activism in India, led by the English-speaking metropolitan elites, illustrates the significance of continuing struggles against inequality. Marginalised sectors within the movements offer peripheral and dissenting perspective that are central to an overall understanding of injustice and inequality, nevertheless. This essay therefore hinges on examples of "failed" queerness, to extend Sara Ahmed's conception of postcolonialism as "failed historicity" (2000, 10). Focusing on instances of activists, and Dalit struggles, within the queer community and illustrations of how Brahminical power is upheld,[10] I point to the failures of coalitional possibilities effectively erased by this consensus. There have been pertinent and crucial critiques from Dalit, feminist and queer Muslim writers. Their critiques pivot on the comprehension, akin to intersectional queer of colour writing, that labour, class, caste, religion, non-access to English language are components of the severally differentiated queer identity in India that need prolific attention. Building upon the im/possibilities of queerness in Indian languages, I add to these debates to argue that understanding and translating queer experiences in India needs to foreground anti-casteist and anti-Islamophobic mobilisation. In other words, queer mobilisation in India is limited and

incomplete if it does not consider the connections between caste, class, religion, language and other defining factors in the Indian context. Similar to queer of colour critique, queer movements in India need to address the absence of analysis of multiple and simultaneous sites of oppression, which renders the mobilisation partial.

Interrogating a/the majoritarian consensus and agreement over the state of queer mobilisation in India becomes necessary when we turn to investments of marginalised communities within queer circuits. Queer activism, led by the metropolitan elites, utilising the dominant self-referential presence of English as the language of rights appears problematic when it erases other modalities of difference notably that of caste and other Indian languages. Insufficiently significant attention has been paid in queer scholarship on India on the intersections of caste, language, gender, sexuality and minority rights. Notable exceptions include Geeta Patel and Anjali Arondekar's recent special issue of *GLQ* (2016), Ashley Tellis's activist and academic writings (2012), and Nishant Upadhyay's latest essay (2020), where they engage with caste and queerness in the Indian context. In the diasporic context, Kareem Khubchandani's essay-interview exploring the co-constitution of sexuality, caste, migration, art, and activism is one other exception (2019). Nonetheless, the overarching signifier of the campaign for decriminalisation of same-sex sexual acts has allowed little engagement with embedded faultlines in Indian society in general. However, outside mainstream academia, there is a proliferation of voices dissenting from the larger queer movement. These voices specifically of transgender, Muslim, and Dalit communities articulate peripheral aspects that are summarily coerced into absence. They are examples of what Kimberlé Crenshaw would term "asymmetric solidarities", whereby the expression of solidarity operates in a unidirectional manner from the marginalised to the central (2015). For instance, trans communities and Dalit queers organised solidarity and mobilisation against the homophobic law in India and yet receive scant solidarity from mainstream movements in their struggles for justice and equality. Further, even within trans communities the call for intersectional approach has gained traction. Gee Semmalar, a trans activist, argues for thinking trans movements as essentially anti-caste. He states that all protests in favour of "gender justice compulsorily have to be anti-caste" and adds that, "there are various ways in which the violence faced by trans communities are rooted in the caste system" (2017).

The inter-implication of caste and trans frames bespeaks a complex set of social arrangement in India which, whilst largely ignored in mainstream movements, predominates in social justice queer and trans activists' mobilisation, functioning to abolish the casteism within their communities.

Queer faultlines

The queer movement in South Asia is more than two decades old. However, the key turning point of the movement appeared in 2009 when the largest country in the region, India, partially overturned the law that criminalised homosexual acts amongst others. Unfortunately, the law was reinstated in 2013 followed by a curative petition in the Supreme Court, which finally decriminalised homosexual acts in September 2018. Like all movements, queer mobilisation differentially codes identifications, which in the case of South Asia, accommodates specific interactions of class, caste, religion, language, race, ethnicity, region and nation with queerness. Precisely, by allowing the particularised version of multiple discourses of colonial/postcolonial South Asia to become central, the various narratives potentially trouble the crystallisation of a/the coherent queer identity that often functions as critical shorthand of Western formulations of homonormative subjects. Simultaneously, my critical stance of stepping away from a celebration of critique to problematise any romantic interpretation of South Asian queer sexuality borrows from interrogations of intersecting oppressions that queer of colour critique foreground. Queer mobilisation in India is made intelligible through the lens of upper-caste, English-speaking both diasporic and non-diasporic, including myself, elite, mobile activists in India. In this context, significant failures of the postcolonial sites occur, in my view. These failures point to and belong to the larger scheme of politics, whereby occurs the breakdown of bonds that tie "asymmetric solidarities" together and, which results in the undoing of queer revolutions altogether.

In the following section, I provide two momentous examples of the faultlines appearing in the celebratory consensus. The two examples that I outline render the formation of coalitions, of solidarities, of connected continuities a perilous terrain. They exemplify the precarious nature of political alliances and solidarities that point

to the erasure or rather the violent erasure of queer subjects within the queer movement.

Faultline 1: Queer Islamophobia

The Islamophobic rhetoric of post-independent India has resulted in at least three wars with Pakistan, the demolition of the Babri Masjid (mosque) in 1991, the Gujarat genocide of Muslims in 2002, the continued brutal oppression of Muslim-majority Kashmir and the granting of the land to Hindu organisations to build the temple to Lord Ram in 2020. The political leadership of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (the Soliders of the Nation), associated with the notion of a Hindu India following the principles of Sanskritised Hinduism wills for a non-secular India, the aspect of 'Hindutva' (pride of being a Hindu) being its sole directive. As early as 1999, Paola Bacchetta instructed us to the endangering lines of this "extremist religious micronationalism" (1999, 141). Bacchetta further forewarned of the construction of the Muslim other through the prism of non-normative sexuality: "Hindu nationalists assign queer gender and sexuality to all the (queer and non-queer) Others of the Hindu nation, especially Indian Muslims" (1999, 143). Additionally, the queer-activist lawyer at the forefront of queer mobilisation against the homophobic law, Arvind Narrain, locates the violent opposition to Islamic and Christian minorities of the Hindu right as an analogue to its "positioning homosexuality/lesbianism as another category needing to be stigmatized in order to construct the pure Hindu nation (2004, 158). In a similar vein, Nishant Upadhyay's recent essay on queer Hindutva provides an incisive critique of the "escalation of dominant caste right-wing Hindu articulations of queerness and claiming of superiority to Muslims and caste Others" (2020, 470). The collusion between the fair-right Hindu, right Hindu and casteist Hindu factions on questions of queer rights and their recuperation of the post-2018 verdict, as Upadhyay suggests, demonstrates a forceful marginalisation of Muslim, Dalit, Christian and other oppressed communities' voices to establish the supremacy of Hinduism as a religion accepting of queerness.

Two charismatic activists and perhaps the most well-known queer/trans activists from India around the world, Ashok Row Kavi and Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, both exemplify the tendency to proclaim brahminical Hinduism and queerness as

being non-antithetical sites of co-existence. Both belong to the upper-class, upper-caste strata of the Indian society and have often offered deeply troubling views on caste and religion.

Laxmi Narayan Tripathi is the self-proclaimed head of the Kinnar (transgender clan) in India. The term "Kinnar" refers to non-normatively gendered peoples. Behind the demand of queer rights and specifically hijra rights in the case of Tripathi the vision of a Hindu India is ever present. The three images below show her gradual but steady progress into a Hindu fanatic over the years. During troubled times with war looming between India and Pakistan she regularly comments on how she will gather an army of transgenders to invade Pakistan and avenge India. In another disturbing gesture, in image 2, she holds the sword to give the idea of Hindu armies defending the country against Muslim invasion. And the last image is a reminder of her partaking in the annual Hindu festival of Kumbh with striking comments on the necessity to build the temple of Hindu God Ram at the exact place where the mosque was demolished in Ayodhya in 1991.

Image 1

Image 2

Image 3

All three images represent Laxmi Narayan Tripathi. The images can be easily retrieved from Google images.

The well-renowned queer activist, Ashok Row Kavi is popular for his queer antics and referring to himself as the Amma, the mother of the queer movement and queer persons in India.

Image 4
Ashow Row Kavi. Retrieved from @Amma29/Twitter

In one of his social media posts, he questions, "Now these queer Muslims are creating their groups because they say that their religion doesn't permit homosexuality and Hindus hate them. Where will the activism go with such belief?" And adds, "If they are so concerned about queer Muslims, why don't they show interest in opening up space for people in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Bangladesh?" (quoted in Singh and Rampal, 2018). Decrying the accusation of being Islamophobic, Row Kavi has, in his defence, routinely alluded to the inclusivity of the Hindu nation that had to embattle "repealing a Christian law" (Singh and Rampal, 2018)[11].

Founder of the Humsafar Trust, Row Kavi is one of the oldest gay/queer activists in India who publicly came out in India in 1984. However, his anti-Muslim and anti-Dalit position has been in line with the ever-entrenching hardline, far-right politics of Hindu organisations in general and the ruling party of Prime Minister Modi in particular. The championing of queer rights for Row Kavi concurrently ties to protecting the Hindu nation from Islamic orthodoxy or rather ridding the national fabric of queer Muslims who question the Hindu majority of the movement. Aligning them with other countries connects to the conservative dream of the Hindu nation

where Muslims are perpetually located as outsiders in their own country. The move is, as queer of colour thinking reminds us, to forge a nation exclusively of a particular, majority ethnic group by excluding its others.

The reasons for critiquing two popular activists of the movement are manifold. Two key points include the need to separate from that which upholds the binary of power, i.e., the oppressor and the oppressed and the large-scale dissemination of the ideas that both Row Kavi and Tripathi represent. Borrowing from the field of literary aesthetics, critique is a form of separation. A separation in activist circuits, I would suggest in this case, is separation from the logic, the binary that holds the determinate superior and inferior into a relation of hierarchical structure. My critique of Tripathi and Kavi therefore argues for a separation from the binarism that Hindutva marshals. In addition, both Row Kavi and Tripathi have almost cult following in India with thousands if not millions of followers. Both represent the image of queer India transnationally influencing the orientation itself of the movement as they receive invitations from across the world to present their activist work. Critiquing their barely disguised islamophobia is a small step to organise resistance. Queer Muslim voices are rising against such ethnocentric moves, specifically with the creation of the queer Muslim collective in Delhi, which documents the queer Muslim experience of reconciling their queer and religious identities in India (Arora, 2019), especially in these times of India and Pakistan being on the brink of a full-fledged war continuously.

Faultline 2: Absent coalitions

The final section on postcolonial queer revolutionary failure reflects on contemporary caste structures in India, grounded as they are in the ideologies of brahminism or brahminical supremacy, with brahmins at the apex of caste hierarchy. A growing assertion of Dalit queer and trans identities, critiquing brahminical upper caste queer and trans movements is gaining momentum evidencing the faultlines that run through queer mobilisation in India. Centring the intersections of caste, gender, and, sexuality, Dalit queer and trans writers argue that sexual/queer/trans liberations are impossible without the annihilation of brahminical heteropatriarchal caste structures. They show how queer and trans movements in India are complicit in upholding upper caste hegemony by focusing on urban upwardly mobile upper caste

queer cis-men identities and issues, and invisibilising all Dalit, queer and trans peoples.

Despite the growing body of activist literature around the intersections of caste and queerness/transness, the site of queer mobilisation remains a fraught terrain with competing narratives (Tellis 2012; Moulee 2016; Bittu 2017; Jyoti 2018; Kang 2018)[12]. However, the preoccupation with intersecting identity formations of Dalit and queer has forged its own path. For instance, at the Delhi Queer Pride in 2015 Dhrubo Jyoti, a journalist, Akhil Kang, a human rights lawyer, and Dhiren Borisa, a doctoral student, three queer Dalit activists made a remarkable disruption with the placard that read 'Dalit, Queer, Proud'. Their intervention critiqued upper-caste hegemony of the queer movement. As Jyoti asserted, "we bring caste up because Caste is everywhere and in my everything, Caste is in my shirt, Caste is in my pant, Caste is in my sex, Caste is in my being and Caste is in every part of you too!" (Jyoti, 2015). Similarly, five years after the intervention, Borisa's account of cities, caste and queerness or what he terms "geography of caste," class and sexuality, critiques the "larger brahminical heteronormative logic that defines lives" (2020). Such timely critiques demonstrate how structures of caste, gender, and sexuality are not only interconnected but also how caste plays a key role in reproducing hegemonic caste structures and upper caste privilege in queer and trans spaces and movements. Endogamic practices, apparatuses of brahminical heteropatriarchy seek to maintain caste boundaries through marriage and regulation of sexuality.

Caste in queer mobilization results in the erasure of caste privilege and casteist violence. For instance, in May 2015, a matrimonial advertisement appeared in one of the leading newspapers in Mumbai, *Mid-Day* (Image 5). The advertisement read "Seeking 25-40, well placed, animal-loving, vegetarian groom for my son."

Image 5 (From *Mid-Day*, 19 May 2015)

The word 'groom' and 'son', noticeably capitalised, revealed an emphasis as did the words 'NGO' and 'Iyer' (the brahmin caste surname). The man in question was an established queer activist and the advertisement was published by his mother. The nefarious nexus of caste privilege and caste violence in the phrase 'though Iyer preferred' and 'vegetarian' in the Indian context, speaks to the multiple ways in which casteist hegemony operates within queer frames. The surname Iyer refers to a high caste brahmin from South India. Queer narratives of equality in India, akin to mainstream accounts of equality in the global North with respect to race, enact an erasure of caste supremacy such that the fiction of equality is preserved. The advertisement reveals what several queers of colour routinely highlight, i.e., the calcified presence of prejudice in queer communities and in this case the undeniable 'preference' of an upper-caste, vegetarian groom. The term vegetarian in contemporary India has become shorthand for orthodox Brahmin-Hindu communities since Muslims, Christians and Dalit populations are under suspicion of consuming and/or supplying meat. The transgender activist, Tripathi, mentioned above, takes immense pride in her brahminical lineage. Tripathi's caste pride read in conjunction with the advertisement, here, reveals a pattern of endogamic lines of marriage and

heritage that have existed almost uninterrupted for centuries and perpetuate in contemporary times. The absent coalitions either between queer of colour and mainstream queer activism in the global North or between queer Dalits, Muslims and minorities and upper-caste Hindu queer elites exhibit, inexorably so, the faultlines that run along critical issues of mobilisation.

Queer issue/s

In conclusion, I am compelled to ask a very straightforward question: Can queer activism in our worlds afford to be single-issue activism? Early queer theorists in the 1990s had already begun a process on the demands of queer as a radical outbranching of political and sexual economies. Eve Sedgwick's work, for instance, signalled a departure from issues of gender and sexuality to bring into focus other parameters of nation and belonging. The continuities in the new millennium with queer of colour critique point to the embeddedness of queerness in commodity capitalism, racialisation and national belonging in the global North, similar to the ways in which Muslims are located as the perpetual outsiders of the (queer) globalised Hindu nation in India. Positioning the queer movement in India within transnational global assessments of queerness does not bespeak a teleological first-in-the-west-then-in-the-rest-of-the-world narrative. Instead, it reminds us that romantic celebration of decriminalisation of queerness in India is surely one of the achievements in equality, which fails in its promise of justice to several constituencies including queer ones. The political critique of western queer formations through the analytic of the queer of colour critique affirms that solidarity or marginal movements can run the risk of becoming constituencies of power, even institutional power. For instance, Fatima El-Tayeb shows how European(s) (queers) of colour, even whilst subject to regular racism and Islamophobia, are integral to European queerness and nationalism (2011). In a similar gesture, the critique emerging from the peripheries of the queer movement in India is not a critique of the queer movement, neither is it a cynical non-participation in the decriminalisation of same-sex sexual acts. Instead, it inaugurates a politics of accountability. Accountability from a movement in which we all have a stake.

The elisions and erasures of several queer movements transnationally overlook the significance of intersectional solidarities. Solidarities, when not purely

performative, are precarious, sometimes necessarily so. Mainstream queer movements in the global north and upper-caste elite queer movements in India arise from spaces of engagement with social equality and justice. Additionally, they possess a genealogy of critical thinking on notions of injustice and exclusion. The reproduction of hierarchies, even the institutional norm, within movements hinders the ethical position that movements begin with initially. The critique emanating from queer of colour quarters in the global north and Dalit and Muslim queers in India gesture towards not just inclusion—an almost exhausted term in our contemporary era—but towards a *sincere* engagement with power imbalance that runs our lives. Solidarity, queer solidarity, must entangle with questions of how queerness has routinely been homogenised to exclude those identities that do not adhere to the standards of the leading, often elite, sub-group. Critical solidarities, in this regard, would entail possibilities of new perspectives reliant on social justice that bring less injury to the already fractured communities we inhabit.

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NOTES

1 Upon the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947, the kingdom of Kashmir partitioned into two territories, has been the subject of at least three wars between the two nations. A third portion of the territory of Kashmir is under the control of China. It is in this context that India introduced article 370 of the Indian constitution guaranteeing a privileged form of autonomous local government and constitution to the state of Jammu and Kashmir. With the revocation of article 370, the region was divided into two union territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. For more context, see https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-49231619

2 See, for instance, https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/mukesh-ambani-promises-investment-jammu-kashmir-reliance-set-up-special-team-1579993-2019-08-12 and, https://indianexpress.com/article/india/now-anyone-can-get-married-to-a-fair-kashmiri-girl-bjp-mla-5884310/

3 Hindutva is the notion of a Hindu nation (Hindu *rashtra*) based on Hinduism. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines Hindutva as "an ideology seeking to establish the hegemony of Hindus and the Hindu way of life," i.e., a non-secular India.

4 I deploy the term 'faultline,' adapting from geographical provenance, to suggest the divisions into subgroups that impede the operation of queer as a comprehensive group. The divisions additionally signal the impossibility of *one*, *unique* political group.
5 Ashley Tellis's essay "Disrupting the Dinner Table" (2012) gestures towards the exclusions based on caste and class within queer mobilisation in India. See also, Shraddha Chatterjee's work on the sexual subaltern, *Queer Politics in India* (2018) and Pushpesh Kumar's recent article on queer necropolitics in the Indian context, "Mapping Queer 'Celebratory Moment' in India" (2020).
6 The term "racial capitalism" coined by Cedric Robinson denotes the intrinsic relationship between capitalism, race and critiques of economic disparities (1983).
7 For a comprehensive list of related resources on the queer of colour critique, see Ferguson, "Queer of Color Critique" (2018).
8 For translating queerness in the Indian context and the need to read caste structures in parallel, see Upadhyay and Bakshi, "Translating Queer" (2020).
9 The full verdict of the Supreme Court is available here, https://www.thehindu.com/news/resources/full-text-of-supreme-courts-verdict-on-section-377-on-september-6-2018/article24880713.ece
10 Brahmins occupy the highest position in the Hindu caste system deeply entrenched in India. The term 'Dalit' is used as auto-definition by the people of the lowest social rung in the caste system in contemporary India.
11 The Bangladeshi queer Muslim editor of a gay magazine, Rasel Ahmed, sought asylum in Kolkata, India where he had escaped to in 2016. However, after the passage of the anti-Muslim citizenship act in 2019, his status as a refugee was under strict control with no long-term favourable outcome in view. See "First person: As a Persecuted Gay Muslim from Bangladesh Seeking Refuge, I Wasn't Welcome in India" (2019).
12 In addition to various social media groups on caste and sexualities, one recent event in 2019 included a panel discussion titled 'Caste and Queerness.' The event, "Queeristan" was organised by the Godrej India Culture Lab. See Nooreyezdan, 2019.